

## PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE TRANSLATION OF JAPANESE DOCUMENTS

1. Captured Japanese documents have proved to be a most invaluable source of intelligence about the enemy. As our offensives in the Far East quicken, the flow of documents will increase in volume and in value. It is of the utmost importance that these documents be processed expeditiously and accurately. The greatest problem in the processing of Japanese documents is the task of translation, since every document must be translated to make its contents available to all who are concerned with producing and disseminating intelligence.

2. The task of the translator of Japanese documents is especially complicated by the language difficulties which are unlike those in the translation of European languages into English. Ideas and information found in Japanese documents are expressed in a fundamentally vague and ambiguous language. It is often impossible to render an exact translation from one language to the other. This is a serious problem where, as in the translation of military documents, it is of the utmost importance that facts and ideas be faithfully reproduced.

3. The translator's task does not consist merely of transposing words and expressions from one language to another. It is a job which requires wide and up to date knowledge about the Japanese and U.S. armed forces. The ideal translator is one who could understand the technical language of any document and be able to interpret accurately the information contained in the document in language which would be meaningful to all who would use the information. To do this he would have to know both languages thoroughly and be familiar with the workings of every branch and service in both armies.

4. Unfortunately, very few individuals have the above requisites. So much meaning must be extracted from the document by deduction based on background or specialized knowledge, that no single translator can be expected to do the job himself. The linguist must be aided with reference materials pertaining to both Japanese and our own armed forces. He should be furnished constant access to expert advice in order to to a satisfactory job of translation.

5. To point out the nature of the difficulties encountered by translators of Japanese documents, two major problems will be discussed below:

A. Technical Terms and Abbreviations. All military documents employ an idiom of their own which is foreign to the layman and Japanese military writing is no exception. Japanese documents are full of military terms and abbreviations not to be found in available dictionaries and other references available. These stumbling blocks to translation are of three types which are described and illustrated below:

(1) New Terms and Abbreviations: New terms in Japanese are created by the simple process of combining two or more characters. Although some indication of the meaning of the resultant compound is given by the component characters this is not always exact or sufficiently descriptive. Something comparable in English is the formation of technical words in special fields, such as: science, philosophy, and logic. Abbreviations in Japanese are made by reversing above process and extracting single characters from a compound. Sometimes the result is another word which, if translated as a word and not an abbreviation, would be entirely erroneous. For example, the translation of RIKU UN as land transportation when it was an abbreviation for RIKU (GUN) UN (YUBU)--Army Transportation Dept which includes shipping, is a typical error against which there is no check except the context of the sentence in which it is found. The abbreviation RIKU A MITSU has to be translated by deduction on the basis of similar abbreviations found elsewhere.

(2) Many terms used by the Japanese Army are not to be found in ordinary dictionaries, since the Army has given them specialized meanings or has definitely restricted their field of meaning. Translation depends here upon research in available Japanese manuals, regulations, etc. In the majority of cases deduction from the context must be employed. Many ordnance terms were looked up in Japanese Army Regulations; others were arrived at by conference with experts in the field of electronic and radar equipment. In most cases attempts to guess at their meanings by analysis of the component characters are futile. In deciding upon the proper U.S. terms to correspond reference materials and expert advice is essential. Since Japanese terms and our own terms do not always refer entirely to the same thing expert advice is necessary to qualify whatever equivalent is used.

(3) Japanese terms having more than one equivalent in English arise from the fact that Japanese terms and categories do not correspond in meaning and scope with standard U.S. Army terms. This leads to the most common difficulty in determining the proper equivalents. Equivalents are determined from the context and their ~~accuracy~~ accuracy depends upon the background knowledge of the translator, the advice of the technical specialist and the reference materials available.

B. Difficulties arising from special grammatical peculiarities and modes of expression in the Japanese language.

Aside from the difficulty of pinning down exact equivalents for military terms and abbreviations, the chief barrier to accuracy in translation is the vagueness typical in Japanese expression. Subjects to sentences are often not stated. There is usually no indication of singular or plural number. Whole paragraphs are combined into one long complex sentence with the main verb at the end. The subordination of clauses is often a problem, because Japanese grammar does not provide for definite distinctions between conjunctions or between certain prepositions. Again, the proper interpretation of a passage depends on the context.

When such Japanese sentences have to be expressed in English the omitted subjects, the proper English conjunction or preposition must be supplied. To thus correct the ambiguous portions is risky because the correction may not express the intent of the original writer. To illustrate, the following is a literal translation of a passage in the 1944 Ordinance Conference document: "Moreover, (automobiles) have been returned with no attention paid to the repair of damages, thus greatly affecting subsequent supply of vehicles." It is impossible to clarify this statement anymore without interpolating ideas of the translator.

The same document shows how ambiguous ~~even~~ in meaning a Japanese sentence can be ~~even~~ to the Japanese. The Japanese officer reading the document had to query a sentence because its structure permitted two different interpretations.

The Japanese language is composed of a combination of Chinese characters which are terse and pithy and a Japanese sentence structure which is long-winded, circuitous and high-flown. Thus there are two extremes to be found in one sentence; both extremes make for ambiguity. The problem of the Chinese characters is to express all the meaning contained in their combinations or to select the proper meaning from a number of possible interpretations. For example, the word HANKAN, which is a combination of two characters meaning "busy" and "not busy" respectively, does not submit to translation. On the other hand the word BUNSO, made up of two characters meaning "divide" and "send" respectively, may mean "divide and send", "distribute", or "send partially."

One other example of the complications of the language is the suffix BESHI, which is found at the end of sentence to indicate the mood of the verb. It has three distinct functions: 1) to make the sentence imperative, 2) to make it conjectural, or 3) to make it potential. Thus, the same BESHI may indicate an order, a prediction, or a statement of possibility.

6. The difficulties discussed above bring out the basic problem confronting translators of Japanese military documents. Every document presents the same difficulties, and these difficulties diminish in proportion to the amount of background knowledge we can bring to bear on that type of document. Documents dealing with Ordnance, Signal, Engineers, Chemical Warfare, and Medical services are particularly difficult because of the greater proportion of specialized knowledge required to interpret the meaning of the original and express it in English with the proper terminology. Dictionaries are limited in usefulness because they do not include new terms, and because the functions of a particular unit are more instructive than isolated dictionary meanings in setting up frames of reference in terms of which valid translations can be made. For all branches, the technical services in particular, experts to work with the linguists are essential.

7. In addition to a staff of experts the building up of a reference library consisting of both Japanese and U.S. regulations, manuals, and official publications of all types is a necessary step. Until more background knowledge can be built up, translation will involve a good deal of reference. The exactness of the finished translation will vary directly with the amount of study the translator will make in references pertinent to his subject. This study, in turn, is dependent upon the backlog of material which we have available.

8. Our experience with the 1944 Ordnance Conference document (PMIRS DK-1) has shown the value of reference materials and the necessity for specialists to be on hand if the document is to be efficiently exploited. It would not have been possible, for instance, in translating a portion of the document dealing with radar equipment to have made meaningful identifications had not considerable study been made of Japanese electronic equipment, and the problem discussed with competent authorities.

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